



HEPATITIS C

What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C (hep C) is a virus that affects the liver. Someone can live with hepatitis C for a long time (20-30 years) before they start to develop any symptoms, feel sick, or see any sign of liver damage. Without testing, treatment or follow-up from a provider, the liver can become scarred and cause people to become ill. Hepatitis C can be very common in certain parts of the world, such as Central, East and South Asia, Australasia and Oceania, Eastern Europe, sub Saharan Africa, North Africa and the Middle East.

What are the symptoms?

Most people have no signs or symptoms of hepatitis C. People who have hepatitis C may have some or all of the following symptoms:

- Fatigue (feeling tired)
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes)
- Dark urine, pale stools
- Abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, poor appetite

How does someone get Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is passed through blood-to blood-contact with someone who has the virus.

The main ways that hepatitis C is passed between people are:

- Sharing needles/syringes or other equipment used to inject drugs, such as cookers, filters, stems, bills/straws, etc.
- Having received blood and/or blood products, or immunoglobulin before 1992
- Tattoos, body piercing/modifications, acupuncture, manicures or pedicures where non-sterile equipment is used
- Sharing personal hygiene items such as razors, toothbrushes or nail clippers
- Maternal transmission (during pregnancy or childbirth)
- Condomless sex where there is a higher risk of blood transmission, such as anal sex, rough sex, party and play, menses, etc

How do I get tested for hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is diagnosed with a two-step blood test: an antibody and an RNA test. Within 6 months after becoming infected, almost everyone has antibodies in their blood that can be measured by the hepatitis C antibody test. If antibodies are found, an RNA test is ordered to determine if you currently have the hepatitis C virus. Hep C antibodies will remain positive in the blood for life, even after somebody has cleared the virus. Even if someone clears the virus (on their own or with treatment), they can get hepatitis C again.

What happens if I have a positive RNA result?

Hepatitis C is a treatable infection. About one in four (25%) people clear hepatitis C without treatment, but most people need treatment to cure hepatitis C. If your RNA test is positive, you will be referred to a hepatitis specialist. Treatment is usually 3 months long and decided with your specialist.

How do I keep my liver healthy?

- Decrease or eliminate alcohol, drug and/or tobacco use
- Get vaccinated against Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B
- Talk to your healthcare provider/pharmacist before starting new medications or natural remedies

How do I practice safer sex?

- Use an internal or external condom, every time you have vaginal and/or anal sex
- Use water-based or silicone-based lubricants
- If you share sex toys, cover the toy with a condom and clean after each use
- Get tested for Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) regularly

How do I practice safer drug use?

- Use a new needle/syringe and other drug equipment every time you use drugs
- Never share equipment with anyone, including your sex partner(s)
- Access safe injection sites for new equipment and care

For more information:

- Canadian Liver Foundation - www.liver.ca, or call 1-800-563-5483
- Health Canada www.phac-aspc.gc.ca
- Ontario Ministry of Health - www.hepcontario.ca
- www.catie.ca (Canada's source of HIV and hep C information) or call their toll-free telephone line at 1-800-236-1638
- Call the AIDS and Sexual Health Infoline at 1-800-668-2437 if you have questions or need help.
- www.sexandu.ca

Sexual Health Clinic

179 Clarence St,
Ottawa. ON K1N5P7
613-234-4641 | TTY: 613-580-9656
Ottawapublichealth.ca

The Site Harm Reduction Program

Site Office (Needle & Syringe and Supervised Consumption Services)

179 Clarence St
Ottawa. ON K1N5P7
613-580-2424 ext. 29047
9am-9pm daily

Site Van- Mobile harm reduction services

5pm-11:30pm daily
613-232-3232 (collect calls accepted)

Visit [Harm Reduction Services In Ottawa](#) for more information on local resources

